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For Immediate Release

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Washington D.C. - The following is a transcript of a press conference held today by Congressman Murtha regarding the lack of progress in Iraq.

Six months ago today, I introduced my resolution to redeploy the troops. Since that time, we've lost 370 Americans, we're spending \$9 billion a month, incidents have increased from 550 a week to 900 a week, and we lost 1,000 Iraqis in the last month.

My plan ...recognizes we have done everything we can do militarily in Iraq and we must redeploy. The president insists our military needs to stay the course, but there's no plan for progress. I have not seen a plan.

One of my military friends said to me (that) when you open up the strategy for victory, there's nothing inside. That's the problem that I see, and that's the thing that's so difficult for me to accept.

Now (there are) those who disagree with me. Even a fourth-grade class the other day (asked), "What happens if we leave?"

Well, what happens if we leave today? What happens if we'd left six months ago? They have to settle this themselves. There's no plan to make things better.

And so it's time for us to leave, to redeploy. And I say that ... the success of Iraq is up to the Iraqis. The Iraqis must settle their differences, and we must set a timetable for the Iraqis to take complete control of their country.

Now, every time a timetable has been set here in Congress, we meet the timetable. Every time they set one in Iraq, they meet the timetable. But here we have no timetable. It's open-ended. And only Iraqis should settle these problems. And they aren't looking for an American solution. We give them an American solution, they forget it and it won't work in the end.

...I measure this differently than they do. Oil production is still below prewar level. Electricity in Baghdad is 2.9 hours per day. Now, we realize that electricity production is spread out over the country, so it's a little bit different. But it's still only 9 or 10 hours a day throughout the rest of Iraq. But (it's) 2.9 hours a day in Baghdad.

Far more than half the Iraqis are unemployed. There's 90 percent unemployment in Al Anbar province, and that's a

province where we have the most trouble.

And when I visit the severely wounded - I go almost every week (and) I was just there last week - at our military hospitals, I ask, "What happened to you?" And they say, "I was looking for IEDs and I was blown up."

That's their mission. That's a hell of a mission. I mean, that's not what they should be doing, and that's what they're doing, and that's how they get killed, over and over again. Sixty-seven percent of the people killed in Iraq have been killed with IEDs.

Over the last six months, more Iraqis have died in sectarian violence. (Do) you know what the definition of sectarian violence is? A civil war. Two factions inside a country fighting for supremacy. That's sectarian violence. We're caught in a civil war, and our military is caught in between. We got 100,000 Shi'as fighting with 20,000 Sunnis.

And we have alienated every country in the region. They used to say, "We're with you in fighting terrorism, but we're not with you in fighting in Iraq." In fact, the war in Iraq has been more harmful. I believe it's been more harmful to us than beneficial in fighting counterterrorism. We've diverted ourselves away from terrorism to the war in Iraq.

If you remember ...on the bottom of most of the television stations, they ran, "A war on terrorism." Now they're running, "A war in Iraq." And that's the way it should be, because that's what we're involved in.

Recently, the president of Iran visited Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population. He visited a prominent university and was overwhelmed with applause from students who supported his stance against the United States.

Many see the United States as being at war with all Muslim nations. You know it's not true, but that's the way they see it.

So who really wants us in Iraq? The Iraqis do not. It's interesting. In a recent poll the Iraqis termed those who attacked Iraqis as terrorists or criminals. Yet 88 percent describe those who attack coalition forces as freedom fighters or patriots. In other words, (if) they attack us, they're freedom fighters or patriots.

The American public certainly does not support this war.

I'll tell you who wants us in Iraq: Iran, Russia, China and North Korea and Al Qaida. There's only 1,000 Al Qaida, 1,000 Al Qaida. The rest are Iraqis (and) we're caught in between.

And while the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, this administration says things are going very, very well. They want to sanitize this war and put a positive spin on things. And they ignore the real story.

Secretary Rumsfeld says progress in Iraq is evidenced by how many satellite dishes he sees on a rooftop. Now, what's wrong with that? They only have 2.9 hours of electricity. So if they have satellite dishes, they can't watch them 21 hours a day.

This trivializes the situation that our Marines and many of our soldiers are facing every single day. Every convoy's attacked. Every convoy's attacked. IEDs (are) exploding all around them. (They're) being shot at every day. (They're) watching their buddies die. (They're) unable to trust the Iraqis. They don't know who their friends are and who the enemies are.

They're under constant and severe stress. Karl Rove recently said the public is sour on the war. The use of the word "sour" disgracefully minimizes the public reaction to the way the administration has run the war.

Try disillusioned, betrayed, deeply concerned about the lives of our service members, the future of the military and the future of the country if we continue down this open-ended, ill-defined path.

The Army's broken. It has serious recruitment problems. Stop-loss, in effect, is a draft of 50,000 soldiers who can't get out. The Army Reserve and Guard have been mobilized. And (our) young officer corps is being hollowed due to the large numbers leaving the service.

Last year, the Army promoted 100 percent of its eligible Army officers from lieutenant to captain, up from a historical average of 70 to 80. This has a detrimental effect on the quality of forces down the road. If you remember, what I said was (that) I'm not only worried about the troops, I'm worried about the future of the military. This is a direct sign of the cost of the military.

Of course, these huge bonus incentives to the personnel costs even affect health care. The Quality of Life Committee couldn't put \$700 million in the quality of life for TRICARE because they didn't have enough money ... TRICARE is one of the most important health care problems for the military, and they were short.

Now, we're going to try to work that out, but at the present time they're short.

Now, not having adequate forces in Iraq, the National Guard's being replaced by Air Force and Navy.

I'm talking to a retired three-star general, and ... he said to me that he was in a room full of Navy officers, all different specialties. One of them was a ship driver; in other words, he was captain of a ship. They had mobilized him to go to Iraq to do civil affairs, in two weeks. He said the whole room was not trained to do the job.

Now, what does it mean when they're not trained. This war is coming at a huge consequence, the unspoken consequence of an overstretched and overstressed force. And when you send in untrained people, you get Abu Ghraib.

I've told the story about the young person from my district who was untrained in that prison, who had a court order against him that he was not able to (see) his family because he abused them. He told the Army that, and the Army still put him in a position to oversee Abu Ghraib. And you know the tremendous impact this had on our troops.

And anybody that's been in combat knows it sears your soul, it's something that you never forget, and you live with it for the rest of your life...

Now, two days after I made my statement, on November 19th, we had an incident in Haditha in Anbar province, where a Marine was killed with an IED. Time magazine reported it, and it's kind of a puzzling report, because they're investigating it right now. Let me tell you what the consequences of this have been.

It's much worse than reported in Time magazine. There was no fire fight. There was no IED that killed these innocent people. Our troops overreacted because of the pressure on them and they killed innocent civilians in cold blood. And that's what the report is going to tell.

Now, you can imagine the impact this is going to have on those troops for the rest of their lives and for the United States in our war and our effort in trying to win the hearts and minds.

We can't operate, we can't sustain this operation. Eighty percent of the Iraqis want us out of Iraq; 47 percent say it's all right to kill Americans.

It's time to redeploy and let the Iraqis settle this themselves.

Be glad to answer any questions.

QUESTION:

The administration continues to give optimistic assessments of a shift of weight of burden from U.S. forces over to security and administration defense...

Congressman Murtha:

Well, let's look at the incident. Let's look at the incidents. Incidents from 550, November 17th, until now, 900 incidents. A thousand Iraqis killed in the last month. The incidents are more than they ever have been before.

And then, of course, electricity. None of the things I measure are better.

If they have 250,000 members of the brigades trained, let them do it. They only have 1,000 Al Qaida. So let them handle it. We can't do this. You can go back and look at the chaos after the Indian and Pakistan division, and you're going to have some chaos. There's no question about it. It's not going to be easy. And that's what people ask me the most.

But there's going to be chaos six months from now because there's no plan. That's what I object to. There is no plan for success.

QUESTION:

What is your current timetable, recommended timetable for withdrawing the troops? And to further develop the point about the chaos that might ensue, what is your response to that? There are a number of your Democratic colleagues who are concerned that the region will descend into chaos.

Congressman Murtha:

There's chaos now. What happened during the election? When the cleric said we don't want any chaos, for two or three days they had no chaos. They have to do this themselves. We can't do it. What is the mission of our troops? Our troops are looking for IEDs, that's what they're doing, and they're getting killed looking for IEDs.

The Iraqis have to settle this themselves. I don't know how deep the chaos will be, but you're losing 1,000 people in the last month, and they're Iraqis. We lost 370 U.S. during this period of time. It's worse than it was six months ago.

My timetable is to immediately ... say to them, "Look, you're going to have to take over yourselves; this is your responsibility, and we're redeploying our forces." The sooner the better, as far as I'm concerned.

And I've never said an immediate withdrawal, but on the other hand, the longer the withdrawal is, the more vulnerable our troops are, because the vulnerability comes in the logistics tail that they have to face because that's where all the IEDs are.

So I'm convinced that there'll be continued chaos because it's a civil war. But like our civil war, only they can handle it. The British got out. The British said, after 200 years in India - maybe it was more years than that - if we get out, there's going to be chaos. There was chaos, but they finally settled it.

And what I'm saying is, six months from now it's not going to be any better because I've not seen any plan that's going to make it better. And the only people can settle is the Iraqis.

QUESTION:

Six months since you first introduced this, what's your sense of support in Congress for this proposal?

Congressman Murtha:

Well, I'll say this. In Congress more and more people are talking to me, more and more people. They're concerned about the very thing this gentleman here asked about, what happens afterwards. But I try to explain to them it's not going to be any better, it's going to be the same. It's going to be the same six months from now as it was six months ago. It's going

to even be worse.

And our troops are the ones paying the price for it. The Iraqis (have) got to settle it themselves.

More and more people are coming around to understanding what we're paying and the price we're paying.

I met with three mothers the other day. And this mother said to me, "These aren't figures. This is my son. This is the light of my life," she said, "and he's gone."

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE)

Congressman Murtha:

Yes. If you look, the basis laid for it. It happened on November 19th. It was discovered by Time magazine in March, and they started to investigate it in March. And I kept hearing reports from Marines who had come out of the field that something like this had happened.

And now I understand the investigation shows that in fact there was no firefight, there was no explosion that killed the civilians in a bus. There was no bus. There was no shrapnel. There was only bullet holes inside the house where the Marines had gone in.

So it's a very serious incident, unfortunately. It shows the tremendous pressure that these guys are under every day when they're out in combat.

(There is) stress and the consequences. You saw the other day where we have so few people. I think it was today's paper (that) they have an eight-page report that I looked at that shows some people with psychological problems are being given drugs and sent back into combat. That's how short they are. And we don't have enough troops.

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) Time did the report and now the Pentagon's doing an investigation?

Congressman Murtha:

The Pentagon has relieved three officers ...hopefully you will see the report in the paper shortly about what the results are. But there's no results so far as I've seen that indicate that it was the fault of the Iraqis in this case. One man was killed with an IED, and after that ... they actually went into the houses and killed women and children. And there was about twice as many as originally reported by Time.

QUESTION:

The power of Congress in all of this is the power of the purse. They haven't listened to you for six months. All of the talk up to this point has been support the troops, support the troops, support the troops.

In order to make your point and get some action, are you willing to lead a movement to withhold funds, cut down the appropriations for the military that funds their operation?

Congressman Murtha:

Well, I've never been willing to cut funds even in Vietnam, toward the end of the war, for the Vietnamese. I think you have to fund the troops who are out in the field. I think we have to have a plan from the executive branch which shows a timetable to get out, and it has to be a short timetable.

And you're going to see that. You're going to see that this fall. ...What I see is them moving in that direction. I see reconstruction money cut off. I see the State Department rehabilitation money - the money that they usually use for helping democracies - cut out. And I see one brigade delayed in their deployment.

So you're going to see a substantial redeployment. At least they won't replace people that are in there. They've got 250,000 troops trained, according to the reports that we see.

Now, I talked to the troops. You may have seen the other day they had these troops trained, they were graduating, they took their uniforms off and threw them down on the ground. Well, you know, that's what the troops tell me versus what the generals tell me is how well trained they are.

The general in Haditha area told me when I was there -- this was last August -- he said, "I don't have enough troops to do my mission."

And this is true, I think, all over the country.

I talked to one of the generals who was in the original meeting when they asked for a number of troops. Now, this is the first time I'd heard this firsthand. There were five people in the room: Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Wolfowitz, General Pace, General Myers and this three-star. And he said, "We asked for 350,000 troops." And of course they didn't get 350,000 troops.

So when they say they got the number that they asked for, that's just not true.

QUESTION:

Congressman, in the context of your resolution and your concern about the troops, what do you think about the president's plan to send the National Guard down to the border? A lot of people are saying they're stretched pretty thin already. They're even talking about giving them a seat on the Joint Chiefs.

Congressman Murtha:

Well, there's a couple things about deploying the National Guard again. We didn't have adequate equipment down in Katrina. And this is one of the major problems with the National Guard in the United States. The ones that have been deployed have left their equipment over in Iraq or their equipment's been depleted or they never got their equipment in the first place.

And the plan, as I see it, they're going to send them over for two weeks to do administrative work. Well, what kind of administrative work? Are they trained to do this kind of work -- backup, technology? I mean, it takes more than two weeks to learn a job.

So I'm not sure what he has in mind here. I'm not sure how this would work. If they're only going to send them for two weeks, by the time they get there, by the time they learn the job, they'll be coming home.

So I'm not sure I understand what the purpose of this is.

QUESTION:

If U.S. soldiers killed innocent women and children, obviously they're responsible, but you alluded to a sort of broader responsibility for something like that. Can you explain that?

Congressman Murtha:

Yes, exactly. I feel that the tremendous pressure and the redeployment over and over again is a big part of this. These guys are under tremendous strain, more strain than I can conceive of. And this strain has caused them to crack in situations like this.

This is going to be a very bad thing for the United States. But the point is, it's not caused only by the troops, it's caused by the fact there's so few of them, and they go out every day, and 42 percent of them don't understand what the mission is.

I mean, I don't make excuses for them, I'm just understanding what their problem is.

QUESTION:

Have you read that report?

Congressman Murtha:

I have not read it, no.

QUESTION:

But you're aware of...

Congressman Murtha:

I'm basing it on information that I've gotten from -- all the information I get. It comes from the commanders. It comes from people who know what they're talking about.

QUESTION:

Mr. Murtha, there are polls out today that suggest that there's even more of an erosion for support on the Iraq war among the American people. Is that the kind of thing that it would take, do you think, to get the attention of the administration, to set a timetable? And if that's not, then what is?

Congressman Murtha:

Well, I'll tell you what they're looking at. And I don't know this from the inside. They're looking at this election. They're looking at a Democratic Congress.

In '74, we picked up 36 of the 43 contested seats. That's the Democrats. Thirteen of the seats Republicans retired, we picked them all up.

Now, in '94 we expected to lose 18. We lost 52. This is going to be a tidal wave. And there are no checks and balances at the present time, and that's what they're worried about. They're worried about subpoena power and investigating these things.

And that's why I predict that they'll start to withdraw troops in the very near future or not replace them, one or the other.

You can't sustain a deployment like that when the public doesn't support it.

And then, on top of that, we got a supplemental where the Army is really hurting.

Now, why is the Army hurting when we put so much money into supplementals? It's hurting because the cost of contracting out where they don't have enough troops...which is sometimes three times as much for the people doing the same job. In other words, you got a guy making \$140,000 standing beside somebody making \$40,000 or \$50,000.

And so O&M costs have skyrocketed, so they're running out of money. And they have to have that money, they say, by the end of this month, this supplemental. I hope we'll get it done. But my staff tells me it's not likely, (that) it's going to be very difficult.

QUESTION:

Is it possible that the administration will, in effect, do just what you outlined in your resolution and at the same time continue to criticize you for you it? And if so, what would you think of that?

Congressman Murtha:

Well, I think that's entirely possible. I would hope, whether they continue to criticize me or not, that they do this, because the country can't stand this kind of divisiveness. I mean, every place I go people stop me, and mothers wearing 82nd Airborne stop me and said, "I've got two sons in Iraq, I agree with you." People in the military said, "Keep telling the truth."

You see the polls. I mean, it's overwhelming that they know -- only the Iraqis can handle this. That's what it amounts to.

Thank you very much.